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City To Test System That Makes Wastewater Drinkable

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## ***Year-Long Study Will Determine If Wastewater Can Be Properly Treated For Drinking***

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**SAN DIEGO --** San Diego city officials announced Thursday the start of a year-long project that will take wastewater and turn it into drinking water.

At the North City Water Reclamation Plant, Mayor Jerry Sanders and officials from the Public Utilities Department said the study will determine whether wastewater can sufficiently be cleaned, filtered and treated for drinking water.

Every day the facility will treat 1 million gallons of water, and that water will be tested for purity. Early results have proven effective, and some water officials argued the treated wastewater is cleaner than the current water running through San Diego taps. Sanders said the project cost \$11.8 million to develop. The money came from a rate increase in 2009 that was eliminated last year once the funding was secured. After a year of testing, the Sanders and the City Council could add the treated wastewater to San Diego's water supply.

"If we went to a full-scale facility, we're estimating that we would produce about 16 million gallons a day," said Project Director Marsi Steirer with the Public Utilities Department.

"So it's a huge additional amount that we would have locally controlled that we wouldn't have to buy from Met (Metropolitan Water District), who sticks it to us every time they get a chance," added Sanders.

The Metropolitan Water District has been selling water at increased rates to much of Southern California and San Diego County. That water costs more because it is imported from Northern California and the Colorado River. Those water rates are eventually passed to consumers.

While San Diegans will have to wait at least a year before the treated water is pumped into their homes, there are cities across the country already using the technology.

Cities in Virginia and Texas use treated wastewater, as do Los Angeles and Orange County. Several environmental groups have also signed off on the process because it will save water, recycle water and prevent dumping of sewage into the ocean.

"Science is science and if science shows over the next year that it's safe, then we can be assured that it's safe," said Sanders.

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